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C O N F I D E N T I A L SEOUL 002094

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/21/2014  
TAGS: [PARM](#) [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [KS](#)  
SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR AND MINDEF DISCUSS BASE RETURNS, EX  
PROCUREMENT, TRAINING, OPCON AND NK MISSILE

Classified By: Amb. Alexander Vershbow. Reasons 1.4 (b,d).

¶1. (C) Summary: During an hour-long June 23 discussion with Defense Minister Yoon Kwang-ung, the Ambassador urged the ROKG to resolve environmental remediation and training range issues, advocated Boeing's bid in the EX procurement, and reaffirmed our commitment to work toward a transfer of wartime OPCON to the ROK, based on enhancements to ROK C2 capabilities. Minister Yoon assured the Ambassador that the ROKG was working on base returns and access to the Chikdo training range, understood U.S. concerns regarding the EX procurement, and would work toward establishing a reasonable timeline of the transfer of OPCON. The Ambassador and the Minister also reviewed the situation regarding North Korean missile launch preparations. End Summary.

#### Base Returns

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¶2. (C) Complimenting MND's efforts to deal with protestors impeding base expansion in Pyongtaek, the Ambassador urged the ROKG to resolve the environmental remediation issue so that base returns could be carried out without further delay. He noted that the U.S. had no choice but to proceed with the approach outlined in DUSD Lawless's recent letter. The U.S. hoped that the return of the "clean" facilities as well as the bases undergoing the LaPorte plan could be carried out in a coordinated manner. Recalling the Minister's recent public statement, the Ambassador said the issue should be viewed in the context of the 53-year old alliance and the contributions of U.S. Forces Korea in maintaining peace and stability on the Peninsula. Moreover, the U.S. approach went beyond SOFA requirements and should therefore be viewed positively by the public.

¶3. (C) Yoon said that the issue was being pursued in the ROKG interagency and that he would do his best to resolve it quickly. While the Ministry of Environment and the NGO community may have different views, MND was fully committed to working together with the U.S. to come up with a constructive solution. Saying the USG should not worry too much, Yoon suggested that the ROKG's eventual decision could lead to demonstrations against both MND and the U.S. Embassy. Noting his recent discussion with Secretary Rumsfeld, Yoon asked the Ambassador whether the LaPorte plan had been briefed to U.S. Congress.

#### Range Access

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14. (C) Highlighting the importance of adequate access to training ranges to maintain our pilots' combat readiness, the Ambassador urged MND to resolve the range problem. Minister Yoon said the ROKG understood the need to facilitate access for U.S. pilots. It was equally important for ROK pilots to have adequate training time. Assistant Minister of Defense Kwon will soon meet with the Mayor of Kunsan to try to resolve the issue. While pursuing a solution in Chikdo, MND would also explore other possible locations. Noting ROK public sensitivities, Yoon said MND's public explanation on this issue would focus on ROK pilots' needs, rather than U.S. requirements. He expressed hope that the U.S. would understand this and avoid unnecessary public comment on the issue.

#### EX Procurement

15. (C) The Ambassador expressed disappointment and concern that the timeline and rules for the EX procurement continued to change in favor of Boeing's competitor. The ROK needed to get the best possible system, especially as it moved to assume wartime OPCON. Recalling his and ROK Ambassador Lee's visit to Boeing, the Ambassador said they saw firsthand that Boeing offered the most capable and interoperable system. He urged the ROKG to make the right decision in a timely manner.

16. (C) Yoon said he fully understood the importance of interoperability and had always been positively inclined toward U.S. systems. However, the procurement process in Korea was now more open and transparent, and MND did not have much leeway in procurement decisions. The EX situation had been complicated by some civilian experts who argued that it

was not necessary for the ROK to purchase such a sophisticated system because the North did not have a comparable system. The Minister said he understood the Ambassador's points, but the defense procurement committee he chairs included skeptical civilian experts.

#### OPCON

17. (C) The Ambassador noted that working-level discussions on the transfer of OPCON were proceeding constructively. The U.S. remained committed to moving forward. However, it was important to manage public expectations regarding the timeline and preparation; it would be a mistake to establish artificial deadlines. Transfer could only take place after providing the necessary C2 capabilities, plans and training.

18. (C) Yoon said he and Secretary Rumsfeld agreed in Singapore that it was appropriate for the ROK to get back OPCON and that the transfer should take place when the ROK had the necessary capability. A complete evaluation of ROK capabilities needed to precede the transfer. The ROK JCS and CFC were working to develop a roadmap and a timeline. Although discussions were continuing, he personally believed it would take at least five years for the ROK to be ready to assume OPCON. Defense experts also had indicated last year that the transfer should happen around 2012. Minister Yoon suggested that President Roh's remarks on this topic have a political angle and should be seen in that context.

#### NK Missiles

19. (C) Noting that the DPRK appeared to be pausing preparations for a possible missile launch to see the international community's reaction, the Ambassador said it was important not to reward Pyongyang for not launching. Our main goal remained to bring North Korea back to the Six Party Talks; rewarding them for not doing what they should not have been doing in the first place would not help bring them back to dialogue. If the DPRK does proceed with a launch, strong

countermeasures will need to be taken.

¶10. (C) Yoon said that he was involved in ROK interagency discussions on this matter and that he would continue to support the ROKG's approach. He understood that Embassy-MOFAT and DoD-MND coordination were proceeding smoothly. This was a complicated matter but he believed things were moving in the right direction.  
VERSHBOW